

South Carolina State Library

Statement on Educational Game Technology in Public Libraries

Approved by Board of Trustees March 26, 2008

Summary

The use of educational game technology in public libraries is appropriate and beneficial, when properly implemented in thoughtful combination with other library services, guided by the library's collection development policies, and aligned with the library's community service goals.

Definitions

The term "educational game technology" includes:

- Computer software having features of game play, and the computer hardware required for play
- Games presented and played on the Internet
- Computer learning games, i.e. educational software or online game-like activities that present organized academic content
- Games that run on special game devices attached to a video screen (i.e. GameCube, Wii, PlayStation)
- Games played on handheld electronic devices

To further clarify: Because these games are screen-based (i.e. use a visual display on a television, entertainment console or computer monitor) they are often referred to as "video games"¹

Service Population

A national survey found that 92% of children, ages 2-17, play video and computer games.¹ 83% of children, eight to eighteen, have at least one video game player in their home.² These figures reinforce the common belief that online game players are primarily youngsters. In reality, the largest demographic group of online gamers is women over the age of 40. Females now make up 38% of *all* game players. The average video game player (of either sex) is now 33 years old and has been playing games for twelve years.³ Although most current programming trends are aimed at teenagers, libraries around the country are beginning to find enthusiastic adult and even senior audiences for game-based programs.

Games in Libraries: Background

Public libraries have traditionally offered many different types of games, over the years providing a community venue for chess tournaments, bingo events, scavenger hunts, and the like. Libraries have also circulated toys and games for children, or provided them for use in the library. These recreational activities are enjoyable, stimulating, and often educationally oriented pursuits entirely suitable for the library. In the 1990's, as computers and Internet access became essential elements of library service, game-like language/literacy and academic support software began to be used in public library children's rooms and computer labs. Online learning games that teach skills such as keyboarding have in recent years become expected library offerings.

The addition of educational video games is simply the inclusion of a different format for learning and recreation. Some electronic game technologies are very new, but many have been popular for thirty years or more. What's truly new is a greater emphasis on

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the social and educational merits of games, and the recognition of additional benefits to the user beyond recreation.

Educational and Social Benefits

The effectiveness of game technology in support of learning is now widely accepted. Educators, industry and the military are extensively adopting educational games with instructional content into formal curricula. A wide range of conventional learning principles are built into these video games, including aspects of critical thinking, problem solving, leadership and team skills, and graduated levels of practice and achievement.⁴ Reading is an important component of video games that are built around rich narrative structures. Many educational games also emphasize group or team work and require that players work together to solve a problem. Games are increasingly used as powerful reinforcements to traditional teaching methods in K-12 classrooms, academic institutions, and distance learning programs.

Educational games in libraries complement this exciting trend by reaching diverse audiences across economic barriers. This leveling characteristic means community members who cannot afford computers or electronic game equipment participate on equal terms with those who can. Additionally, new developments in game controls and game design extend the enabling features of game play to people with physical and learning disabilities. Public libraries use these tools to address inequities and empower users as never before.

South Carolina State Library Endorsement

The State Library vigorously supports the inclusion of educational game technology in recreational and educational contexts in public libraries. Game play at the library engages community members in academically and socially beneficial activities, and removes barriers for the disadvantaged. Librarians select educational game technology with the same care used in choosing traditional library resources. Implemented with clear goals that complement the library's mission, game programs lead to positive outcomes for a broad spectrum of library users.

Educational games offer a fresh and contemporary appeal to non-traditional library users, drawing audiences who have in the past been difficult to attract and providing opportunities to promote other library resources. The effect of *not* including educational game technology in the library's service offerings is to reduce the number of library users and hence reduce the effectiveness of the library's facilities and its traditional resources and programs.

Use of Public Funds for Educational Game Technology Purchases

By South Carolina law, State Aid funds may be used to purchase library materials and resources in all formats for service to the public. State Aid statutes require libraries' acquisition of materials to be guided by and consistent with a collection development policy approved by the local Library Board.³ Education Lottery funds, when available to libraries, must be expended as directed by statute, for "educational technology delivery, upgrade, or maintenance."⁴ The State Library affirms that educational game technology falls under this heading.

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¹ National Institute on Media and the Family (2001). Sixth annual video and computer game report card. Accessed at: http://www.mediafamily.org/research/report_vgrc_2001-2.shtml (last visited 8-22-07).

² Kaiser Family Foundation (2005, March). "Generation M: Media in the lives of eight to eighteen year olds. " Available online at: <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia030905pkg.cfm> (last visited 8-22-07).

³ John C. Beck, Got Game: How the Gamer Generation is Reshaping Business Forever, Harvard Business School Press, 2004

⁴ Jenny Levine, "Gaming & Libraries: Intersection of Services", Library Technology Reports, Sept./Oct. 2006 (Vol. 42, No. 5)

⁵ James Gee, What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004

⁶ (S.C. State Library R. 75-1-D)

⁷ (S.C. 59-150-350-C.2.)